

# NIAAA

## Understanding Alcohol's Impact on Health

### Alcohol and American Society: A Complex Relationship

Alcohol has long been an integral part of American culture, tightly woven into the fabric of society. Most adults who drink alcohol drink moderately and responsibly without complications, and some can even derive modest health benefits.



At the same time, alcohol-related problems among adults and adolescents—which result from drinking too much, too fast, or too often—are among the most significant public health issues in the United States and internationally. For example,

- Each year in the United States, nearly 88,000 people die from alcohol-related causes, making it the third leading preventable cause of death in our country.<sup>1</sup>
- Excessive alcohol consumption costs the United States about \$249 billion per year.<sup>2</sup>
- In the United States, approximately 16.3 million adults ages 18 and older had an alcohol use disorder in 2014.<sup>3</sup>
- More than 10 percent of U.S. children live with a parent with alcohol problems, according to a 2012 study.<sup>4</sup>
- Globally, alcohol misuse is the fifth leading risk factor for premature death and disability.<sup>5</sup>

### NIAAA's Valuable Contribution

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), a component of the National Institutes of Health, is the lead Federal agency for research on alcohol and health. NIAAA is the largest funder of alcohol research in the world, with an integrated and multidisciplinary program that includes genetics, basic and clinical research, neuroscience, epidemiology, prevention, and treatment.

continued



NIAAA's research focuses on health topics that touch the lives of almost every family and community across America:

- Why some people develop an alcohol use disorder
- How the consequences of harmful drinking affect individuals and society
- How underage drinking impacts neurobiological development in adolescents
- How we can improve prevention, treatment, and recovery programs
- How and why some individuals derive modest health benefits from drinking alcohol



Importantly, the Institute's demanding scientific approach generates results that are unbiased, methodologically sound, and trustworthy—making NIAAA the definitive source for science-based information about alcohol and health for individuals, communities, policymakers, and medical practitioners.

In the alcohol prevention and treatment field, there are more life-saving tools available today than ever before, thanks largely to the determined and uncompromising efforts of the talented researchers supported by NIAAA.

Looking forward, NIAAA will continue to work toward a greater understanding of alcohol's effects on health and society—an understanding that will help more people live long and healthy lives.

**For more information, please visit: [www.niaaa.nih.gov](http://www.niaaa.nih.gov)**

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Alcohol use and your health. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/alcohol-use.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Sacks, J.J.; Gonzales, K.R.; Bouchery, E.E.; Tomedi, L.E.; and Brewer, R.D. 2010 National and state costs of excessive alcohol consumption. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 49(5):e73–e9, 2015. Available at: [http://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(15\)00354-2/abstract](http://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(15)00354-2/abstract)

<sup>3</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH). Table 5.8A—Substance Dependence or Abuse in the Past Year Among Persons Aged 18 or Older, by Demographic Characteristics: Numbers in Thousands, 2013 and 2014. Available at: <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-DeTabs2014/NSDUH-DeTabs2014.htm#tab5-8a>

<sup>4</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Data spotlight: Over 7 million children live with a parent with alcohol problems. 2012. Available at: <http://media.samhsa.gov/data/spotlight/Spot061ChildrenOfAlcoholics2012.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Lim, S.S.; Vos, T.; Flaxman, A.D.; et al. A comparative risk assessment of burden of disease and injury attributable to 67 risk factors and risk factor clusters in 21 regions, 1990–2010: A systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2010. *Lancet* 380(9859):2224–2260, 2012. PMID: 23245609

February 2016

